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THE PLACE OF ACTION OR DEEDS IN A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

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CONSIDERABLE attention has been given of late in secular education to the importance of training children in manual dexterity and in laboratory practice. It has long been recognized that some phases of even intellectual development were impossible without this union of action and practice with theory and belief. "Action," as one great teacher has said, "is three-fourths of life."

President Eliot of Harvard University said recently before an audience of clergymen :

As I weigh the forces that affect mankind, and look back upon the course of human history and the progress of Christianity, it seems to me the first and greatest civilizer is steady work. That is the way the race is lifted out of barbarism into semi-civilization, and then into civilization. Labor, steady labor, is the great civilizer. The Protestant churches are too intellectual and too emotional on the part of the teacher or preacher, and call for too little of personal exertion on the part of the recipient of the inspiration.

This is a true and searching criticism of our Sunday-school system of religious training. In it we take no account of and provide no place for this whole side of moral and religious education. We thus violate one of the most important fundamental principles of human nature and the science of pedagogy: the principle, namely, that the child gets no benefit from a lesson where there is no corresponding reaction on the part of the pupil. The moral and spiritual benefit that should remain in the child's life after being taught any given lesson does not come from merely telling that child something which appeals either to its intellect or even its feelings. If we teach a child any intellectual idea successfully, we have to get the corresponding intellectual reaction; if we touch its feelings, we must get a sympathetic

reaction in return, or we have merely dissipated its emotional nature. But the intellectual training and the emotional quickening are only means to an end in the moral and religious education of the pupil. That end is action, deeds, conflict, a completed life in the personal application of the truth, which we call character.

Moral and religious education is not, and can never be considered, complete without the answering deeds which any particular truth or feeling is intended to call forth. The world is full of well-instructed knaves, and dreaming sentimentalists, but character demands action. It is a deed that incarnates the moral principle and proves that the heart and will of the doer are consenting to the virtue. Instruction both in Bible doctrine and incident may remain purely intellectual or purely emotional, and in remaining so miss being efficient agents of moral and religious training. These forces must be transmuted into character, and the agency which accomplishes this is action. The pupil must not only know and feel, but must consent to act thus, and so from love of the truth, from principle, because in his secret heart he desires to be true and good like the example set before him.

This side of education opens up a large field, giving cause for anxiety as well as hope; for responses and actions to such appeals must not be artificial, but real and spontaneous. One consideration is, however, of great value in its bearing on the relation of a scientific system of instruction to this fundamental principle of character-building. It is the circumstance that habit tends to make action spontaneous, and therefore it becomes, with the proper training, as easy to perform good deeds as bad ones. For the normal child, under proper discipline, the virtuous action is more natural than the immoral one. If, therefore, we want our boys and girls to be virtuous in every fiber of their will and imagination, they must be taught from their earliest infancy to do good actions, whether they know the reasons for them or not. It is sufficient that they respond to any lesson or appeal that love or authority should set before them, and so their character grows with their growth, and in their maturer years they find themselves

doing the right spontaneously, as well as by preference over the evil. As it is the unvarying, unhesitating, spontaneous act of courtesy that makes a gentleman, so it is the unhesitating, unvarying, spontaneous choice of virtue that makes the Christian. Of course, there are all degrees of response, because there are all degrees of moral culture, but moral training simply means the eliminating of the obstructing causes of spontaneous virtue.

In the moral training of the child, then, response and action must go hand in hand with knowledge and feeling, and we must not wait for a crisis in the child's life; every experience, whether from truth taught or endearments lavished, is a crisis in the moral life and should be followed by its appropriate action; for in this only does the fruit of character reach maturity. But maturity in this sense does not mean the maturity of a completed character; simply that of the appropriate virtue of a child's nature. The moral change in each lesson is infinitesimal in the single case, but infinite in the gradual cumulative force of moral and spiritual qualities added to the total life.

A practical instance of this form of religious instruction has already been seen in the case of many circles of King's Daughters and of Junior Societies of Christian Endeavor, that perform personal service for young people of their own age in social settlements and other philanthropic institutions. These and kindred societies have of late laid great stress on the idea that virtue means doing things, not talking about them and rehearsing their own pious feelings. And the remarkable interest shown by the young people in this side of moral instruction is evidence that it supplies a legitimate demand of the soul in the maturing years of Christian education. Especially has it been helpful in eliminating the pharisaical and priggish vices of a youthful religious experience. Nothing is worse for a child than to be over-conscious of his religious experience. The child should love its mother and its God as naturally as the flower blooms and the bird sings. In a Christian home and under proper religious instruction, this side of its nature should develop as naturally and unconsciously as it breathes and plays, and its virtuous feelings and deeds should be as normal as its

mental processes. The child who is taught to minister to a wounded bird because it is God's creature, and to speak truth because He loves purity in the inward parts, will not be poisoned in spirit with the pharisaical consciousness that he is a good boy for so doing, but he will do those things as naturally as he plays and thinks. Action, deeds, the doing of service, are the open air, the sunlight, the salt of the sea that make doctrinal and emotional teaching robust and manly, and the hygiene of the soul.

What form this education in action would take under a scientific system of religious instruction can only be dimly outlined, but the one interesting practical feature may be pointed out. The teacher following such a system will know what particular ideas and virtues are being inculcated at a given period, and accordingly he will know the corresponding reactions or practical deeds that should accompany them. At present the teacher does not know what to ask the pupils to do; and he is as likely to blunder into asking them to do the inappropriate things as to do the kind of actions that will build their character at this stage of their education. A certain class of feelings and ideas are appropriate for children of ten years which are not appropriate for lads of sixteen or eighteen; so with actions. What the youth of eighteen would properly regard as childish may be suitable and necessary for a child of ten. It would be quite reasonable to look for such a series of doings accompanying their lessons, arousing the curiosity and securing the interest of the youth, just as manual training and laboratory work supply the deep craving of the growing mind and body for physical activity.

Around this feature of a truly scientific system of religious instruction in our modern Sunday schools many of the most valuable forms of service for young people might center, and obviate the growing evil of multiplying societies for every kind of service. The club, the guild of service for the social settlement work, the hospital flower mission, forms of service for the home and the school, park and open-air work for the congested districts of our cities, young people's home and foreign missionary societies—these and many other forms of work could all be help-

fully associated with the Sunday school, and not separated from it as they are at present, and remaining the purely individualistic and unrelated activities of a few. The church and civic life of the day needs systematic training in practical work, both for its own missions and the larger philanthropies of life; and the nation will never see a generation of generous givers until it sees a generation of trained workers. Sunday-school instruction as mere theory, mere doctrine, mere sentiment, must be supplanted with instruction in deeds and in the vital relation to the Christian and civic life of the people.